

# Racial Ideology between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Julius Evola and the Aryan Myth, 1933–43

Peter Staudenmaier 

Marquette University, USA

Journal of Contemporary History

0(0) 1–19

© The Author(s) 2019

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/0022009419855428

journals.sagepub.com/home/jch



## Abstract

One of the troublesome factors in the Rome–Berlin Axis before and during the Second World War centered on disagreements over racial ideology and corresponding anti-semitic policies. A common image sees Fascist Italy as a reluctant partner on racial matters, largely dominated by its more powerful Nazi ally. This article offers a contrasting assessment, tracing the efforts by Italian theorist Julius Evola to cultivate a closer rapport between Italian and German variants of racism as part of a campaign by committed antisemites to strengthen the bonds uniting the fascist and Nazi cause. Evola's spiritual form of racism, based on a distinctive interpretation of the Aryan myth, generated considerable controversy among fascist and Nazi officials alike. In light of the current revival of interest in Evola, a closer examination of these debates can deepen historical understanding of racial ideologies from the fascist era.

## Keywords

antisemitism, Aryan myth, Julius Evola, fascism, Nazism, racism

As scholarly debates about the convoluted relations between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany become increasingly sophisticated, the role of racial ideology in the Rome–Berlin Axis remains a contested topic. An older historical tradition held that the fascist racial laws, adopted in 1938, were primarily a product of the alliance with Nazi Germany. Recent research, in contrast, emphasizes autonomous Italian currents of racism and antisemitism that culminated in the official targeting

---

## Corresponding author:

Peter Staudenmaier, Department of History, Marquette University, Milwaukee WI 53201, USA.

Email: [peter.staudenmaier@marquette.edu](mailto:peter.staudenmaier@marquette.edu)

of Jews from 1938 onward.<sup>1</sup> If the Nazi regime has usually been viewed as the chief advocate of an aggressively racist Axis program before and during the Second World War, with Italy at best a junior partner, there are signs of that consensus currently being called into question.<sup>2</sup> Yet a recent overview underscores ‘the need for more empirical research on various facets of racism within the Axis alliance’.<sup>3</sup> A case study of Italian initiatives on race, led by fascist thinkers but meant to incorporate and influence German viewpoints as well, can shed new light on this disputed history.

The controversial writer Julius Evola makes an improbable subject for such an analysis. An unorthodox figure within fascist ranks, Evola (1898–1974) had a combative relationship with other supporters of Benito Mussolini’s regime. He was not a member of the Fascist Party and was openly critical of what he saw as its needless concessions. His own political views were often much more radical than the fascist mainstream.<sup>4</sup> But Evola’s extensive contacts in Germany, along with his idiosyncratic version of the Aryan myth, offered a potential bridge linking fascist and Nazi racial theories. He was one of the early Italian proponents of an uncompromising antisemitic stance, publishing a stream of articles, pamphlets, and books on race from the early 1930s onward. In addition to his publications, Evola’s work behind the scenes with Nazi as well as fascist officials reveals the tangled racial politics that both united and divided the Axis powers.

Though key details remain obscure, the story of this ideological convergence and its eventual undoing provides crucial insights into the vicissitudes of cross-border cooperation between different strands of racist thought. Whether under fascist or Nazi auspices, a shared commitment to Aryan solidarity could not mask the

1 For overviews see Andrea D’Onofrio, ‘I rapporti tra Italia e Germania e il razzismo fascista’, in Marcello Flores (ed.), *Storia della Shoah in Italia: Vicende, memorie, rappresentazioni* (Turin 2010), 221–55; Ilaria Pavan, ‘Fascism, Anti-Semitism, and Racism: An Ongoing Debate’, *Telos*, 164 (2013), 45–62; Mario Toscano, ‘Il dibattito storiografico sulla politica razziale del fascismo’, in Giorgio Resta (ed.), *Le Leggi Razziali: Passato/Presente* (Rome 2015), 9–41; Simon Levis Sullam, ‘The Italian Executioners: Revisiting the Role of Italians in the Holocaust’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 19 (2017), 22–38.

2 Compare Michele Sarfatti, ‘Autochthoner Antisemitismus oder Übernahme des deutschen Modells? Die Judenverfolgung im faschistischen Italien’, in Lutz Klinkhammer (ed.), *Die “Achse” im Krieg: Politik, Ideologie und Kriegsführung 1939–1945* (Paderborn 2010), 231–43; Christian Goeschel, ‘Italia docet? The Relationship Between Italian Fascism and Nazism Revisited’, *European History Quarterly*, 42 (2012), 480–92; Thomas Schlemmer and Hans Woller, ‘Zur Bedeutung von Rassismus und Antisemitismus für den Faschismus’, in Schlemmer and Woller (eds), *Der Faschismus in Europa* (Berlin 2014), 123–44; Valeria Galimi, ‘Politica della razza, antisemitismo, Shoah’, *Studi Storici*, 55 (2014), 169–81; Filippo Focardi, ‘Italy’s Amnesia over War Guilt: The “Evil Germans” Alibi’, *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 25 (2015), 5–26.

3 Patrick Bernhard, ‘Blueprints of Totalitarianism: How Racist Policies in Fascist Italy Inspired and Informed Nazi Germany’, *Fascism*, 6 (2017), 127–62, quote on 131.

4 Much of the literature on Evola, particularly in Italian but at times in English and German as well, is written by his followers and sympathizers and is of little historical value. Scholarly studies include Furio Jesi, *Cultura di destra* (Milan 1979), 77–102; Thomas Sheehan, ‘Diventare Dio: Julius Evola and the Metaphysics of Fascism’, *Stanford Italian Review*, 6 (1986), 279–92; Franco Ferraresi, ‘Julius Evola: Tradition, Reaction and the Radical Right’, *Archives européennes de sociologie*, 28 (1987), 107–51; Francesco Cassata, *A destra del fascismo: Profilo politico di Julius Evola* (Turin 2003); Paul Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* (London 2011); Elisabetta Cassina Wolff, ‘Apolitia and Tradition in Julius Evola as Reaction to Nihilism’, *European Review*, 22 (2014), 258–73.

conflicting expectations and incompatible standards brought to the project. But the temporary success that Evola and his entourage enjoyed in the early 1940s, when racial ideology was anything but an academic exercise, points to an under-appreciated dimension of the uneasy German-Italian alliance. Tracing the development of Evola's interactions with the fascist and Nazi bureaucracies through archival sources as well as published texts, this study offers a transnational perspective on the deployment of racial myths in the charged political context of persecution, war, and destruction.

When the Rome–Berlin Axis was proclaimed in 1936, it seemed to augur a new era of cooperation between the fascist and Nazi regimes. Several basic differences nonetheless remained unresolved. Perhaps the most conspicuous concerned racial policy: while Nazi Germany had pursued an antisemitic program from the beginning, Fascist Italy did not follow suit until years later. The contrast was a source of chagrin for Nazi officials, who sometimes viewed their ally as timid and unreliable regarding the 'Jewish question.'<sup>5</sup> But there were voices within the fascist movement calling for antisemitic measures all along, in an intricate dynamic of both collaboration and competition with their German counterparts. Among the most distinctive of those voices was Julius Evola.

An artist and author with diverse cultural interests, Evola espoused a worldview known as Traditionalism that combined occultist and neo-pagan influences in an aristocratic rejection of modernity. Evola's 'revolt against the modern world' aimed to restore a primeval hierarchical order.<sup>6</sup> His beliefs about a common Aryan heritage shaped his perspective on Germany. Even before the advent of the Nazi regime, Evola had a longstanding relationship with thinkers on the German right, especially those affiliated with the so-called 'conservative revolution' tendency.<sup>7</sup> Fluent in German, he published in Nazi venues as early as 1930.<sup>8</sup> He continued to cultivate

5 Meir Michaelis, *Mussolini and the Jews: German-Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy 1922–1945* (Oxford 1978); Reiner Pommerin, 'Rassenpolitische Differenzen im Verhältnis der Achse Berlin-Rom, 1938–43', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 27 (1979), 646–60; Andrea Hoffend, *Zwischen Kultur-Achse und Kulturkampf: Die Beziehungen zwischen "Drittem Reich" und faschistischem Italien in den Bereichen Medien, Kunst, Wissenschaft und Rassenfragen* (Frankfurt 1998), 357–425; Kilian Bartikowski, *Der italienische Antisemitismus im Urteil des Nationalsozialismus 1933–1943* (Berlin 2013). On the broader cultural politics of the Axis see the recent study by Benjamin Martin, *The Nazi-fascist New Order for European Culture* (Cambridge 2016).

6 Julius Evola, *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno* (Milan 1934); Anna Jellamo, 'Julius Evola: Il pensatore della tradizione', in Franco Ferraresi (ed.), *La destra radicale* (Milan 1984), 214–52; Christophe Boutin, *Politique et tradition: Julius Evola dans le siècle (1898–1974)* (Paris 1992), 65–207; Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford 2004), 95–117.

7 Patricia Chiantera-Stutte, *Julius Evola: Dal dadaismo alla rivoluzione conservatrice, 1919–1940* (Rome 2001); Michael Thöndl, 'Bewahrung durch Umbruch: Die "Konservative Revolution" in Italien', in Hans Lietzmann (ed.), *Moderne Politik: Politikverständnisse im 20. Jahrhundert* (Opladen 2001), 81–102.

8 Julius Evola, 'Die Bedeutung des faschistischen "Antieuropa" für die Außeritalienischen Länder', *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte*, December 1930, 424–5.

a German audience throughout the decade with repeated speaking tours in the Third Reich. Two of his major works appeared in German translation in 1933 and 1935.<sup>9</sup> His wide-ranging analysis of the 'Jewish problem' was published in Italy in 1936, two years before the regime's official antisemitic turn.<sup>10</sup>

This background gave Evola unique stature in Nazi eyes. He published articles on race, the Aryan tradition, and the Jewish threat in German periodicals into the 1940s.<sup>11</sup> Evola maintained friendly contacts with Nazi race ideologues Ludwig Ferdinand Clauß and Johann von Leers. As his appreciation for Nazi visions of Aryan glory grew, Evola came to admire the SS as an elite order representing superior values.<sup>12</sup> An increasing kinship with Nazism, which had supposedly restored Germany to its original majesty and reclaimed the inheritance of Nordic paganism, counterbalanced his doubts about its all too modern political character.

Despite sympathy for the achievements of Adolf Hitler, however, Evola never fully embraced Nazi racial precepts. Indeed his early assessments could be harshly critical. When the Nazi regime was established in 1933, Mussolini had been in power for a decade, and fascist thinkers sometimes looked down on their upstart northern neighbors. Evola's evolving attitudes toward Nazi racial thinking generally followed the vagaries of fascist policy regarding the new German government. Mussolini and Hitler were often rivals, and tensions over Austria and other points of Italian-German contention left relations between the two dictators particularly strained during the early years of Nazi rule. In this fraught context, Mussolini encouraged public denunciations of Nazi racial doctrine.<sup>13</sup> Evola's two major contributions to this campaign appeared with prominent placement in late 1933 and early 1934.

9 Julius Evola, *Heidnischer Imperialismus* (Leipzig 1933); Evola, *Erhebung wider die moderne Welt* (Stuttgart 1935).

10 Julius Evola, *Tre aspetti del problema ebraico* (Rome 1936). The book presented a critique of the shortcomings of contemporary antisemitism, including National Socialist varieties, and argued for a stronger and more effective antisemitism. Cf. Evola, 'Sulle ragioni dell'antisemitismo', *Vita Nova* May 1933, 356–62; Evola, 'Gli ebrei in Italia e il vero problema ebraico', *Vita Italiana*, June 1937, 659–68; Evola, *Il mito del sangue* (Milan 1937); Evola, *Indirizzi per una educazione razziale* (Naples 1941).

11 Julius Evola, 'Über die alt-arische Auffassung des Sieges und des "Heiligen Kampfes"', *Geist der Zeit*, October 1939, 698–702; Evola, 'Über die metaphysische Begründung des Rassegedankens', *Europäische Revue*, March 1940, 140–4; Evola, 'Das England von heute – von Juden geformt', *Die Aktion*, January 1941, 171–3; Evola, 'Arisch-römische Entscheidung', *Wir und die Welt*, September 1941, 353–7; Evola, 'Reich und Imperium als Elemente der neuen europäischen Ordnung', *Europäische Revue*, February 1942, 69–75. As Hoffend observes: 'Of all the Italian antisemites and racial theorists, the only one who maintained a media presence in the Third Reich from the beginning was Julius Evola'. Hoffend, *Zwischen Kultur-Achse und Kulturkampf*, 375.

12 Julius Evola, 'Le SS, guardia e ordine della rivoluzione crociuncinata', *Vita Italiana*, August 1938, 164–73. On the evolution of Evola's views on Nazism see Cassata, *A destra del fascismo*, 190–214, and Francesco Germinario, *Razza del sangue, razza dello spirito: Julius Evola, l'antisemitismo e il nazional-socialismo, 1930–43* (Turin 2001).

13 For context see 'The Quarrel over Austria' in Elizabeth Wiskemann, *The Rome–Berlin Axis* (Oxford 1969), 38–58, and 'The Challenge of Adolf Hitler, 1932–1934' in R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London 2010), 214–31. The most thorough recent study of relations between the two dictators is Christian Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler: The Forging of the Fascist Alliance* (New Haven, CT 2018).

The first article was a brief disquisition offering ‘critical observations’ on the excessively ‘naturalistic’ components of Nazi racial ideology. Here Evola outlined his philosophy of ‘spiritual’ racism and contrasted it to the ‘materialist’ racism that predominated within National Socialism, warning that a materialist outlook failed to take heed of the ‘metabiological’ aspects of race. Fascism, he concluded, had already shown the way toward the ‘higher reality’ proper to the ‘Aryan peoples’.<sup>14</sup> The second article applauded Nazism’s revival of ‘Aryanism’ and its salutary contrast between ‘superior races and inferior races’, but cautioned that biological theories of race were not aristocratic enough and did not grasp true racial nobility.<sup>15</sup> Notwithstanding their respectful tone toward Hitler and the Nazi ‘revolution’, both essays asserted fascism’s primacy in regard to racial questions.

At its core, the ‘spiritual racism’ championed by Evola posited a fundamental dichotomy between the Jewish spirit and the Aryan spirit, expressed in cultural, intellectual, and physiological terms.<sup>16</sup> Its proponents drew on an eclectic mix of religious and scientific elements, proposing a vision of Aryan supremacy adapted to an Italian context. Evola insisted that standard forms of ‘materialist’ racism were not up to the task of confronting the ‘Jewish menace’ in its full depth and breadth. Since race was ‘not merely physical’, biological racism was a necessary starting point, but ‘insufficient’ by itself. Focusing only on superficial traits would leave the racist program ‘severely crippled’.<sup>17</sup> Spiritual racists thus demanded more radical measures than their fellow fascists.

For all his eccentricities, Evola was hardly alone in promoting such views. He received institutional support from journalist Giovanni Preziosi (1881–1945) and fascist hard-liner Roberto Farinacci (1892–1945). Preziosi was publisher of the periodical *La Vita Italiana*, while Farinacci, former Secretary of the Fascist Party, sponsored the newspaper *Regime Fascista*. Both organs served as a platform for militant racist currents within the fascist milieu. In 1937 Preziosi and Evola published an Italian version of the infamous antisemitic forgery, the ‘Protocols of the Elders of Zion’.<sup>18</sup> Other members of their circle had ties to Germany. Alberto Luchini (1897–1973), director of the Institute of Fascist Culture in Florence, was an early interlocutor for Nazi intellectuals before 1933 and portrayed National Socialism as the fulfillment of the spiritual yearnings of the German

14 Julius Evola, ‘Osservazioni critiche sul “razzismo” nazionalsocialista’, *Vita Italiana*, November 1933, 544–9.

15 Julius Evola, ‘Razza e Cultura’, *Rassegna Italiana*, January 1934, 11–16.

16 Compare Mauro Raspanti, ‘I razzismi del fascismo’, in Centro Furio Jesi (ed.), *La menzogna della razza: Documenti e immagini del razzismo e dell’antisemitismo fascista* (Bologna 1994), 73–89; Elisabetta Cassina Wolff, ‘Biological Racism and Antisemitism as Intellectual Constructions in Italian Fascism’, in Anton Weiss-Wendt (ed.), *Racial Science in Hitler’s New Europe* (Lincoln, NE 2013), 175–99; Peter Staudenmaier, ‘Antisemitic Intellectuals in Fascist Italy: Promoting “Spiritual Racism”, 1938–1945’, in Sarah Danielsson (ed.), *Intellectual Antisemitism* (Würzburg 2018), 95–116. A comprehensive treatment of Evola’s racial views can be found in the excellent study by Germinario, *Razza del sangue, razza dello spirito*.

17 Julius Evola, ‘Sul problema della “razza dello spirito”’, *Vita Italiana*, February 1942, 153–9.

18 Giovanni Preziosi and Julius Evola (eds), *L’internazionale ebraica: I ‘Protocolli’ dei ‘savi anziani’ di Sion* (Rome 1937).

people.<sup>19</sup> Luchini participated in antisemitic congresses in Germany in 1937 and 1938.<sup>20</sup> His antisemitic writings appeared in *Gerarchia*, 'the monthly journal of the fascist revolution', proclaiming a 'spiritualist-fascist conception' of race as a bulwark against the 'anti-race' of the Jews.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps the most prolific exponent of this standpoint was Massimo Scaligero (1906–80), whose writings exemplified spiritual racism in its purest form. Considered Evola's 'loyal popularizer', Scaligero combined esoteric and pagan motifs into an elaborate racial worldview.<sup>22</sup> His publications teemed with references to Atlantis and Thule, the Eddas and the Holy Grail, ancient Indian deities and Greek mythology. Like his mentor Evola, Scaligero maintained that biological forms of racial purity did not go far enough: 'eugenics alone is not sufficient for a totalitarian racist praxis'.<sup>23</sup> More rigorous scrutiny was necessary in order to detect the perfidious traces of Jewish influence, as it was always possible for a 'non-Roman, non-Aryan, non-Italian' soul to be concealed within an Italian body.<sup>24</sup>

Jews were not, of course, the only target of spiritual racism. Against the backdrop of fascist colonial policy, Evola and his followers were equally disdainful toward Africans. In a September 1935 letter to Scaligero, with war in Ethiopia approaching, Evola referred contemptuously to 'Negroes and other colonial insects'.<sup>25</sup> Scaligero's articles combined multiple strands of racism, denigrating the 'Negroid races' as bearers of 'Asiatic-Semitic contamination' and a constant threat to 'the white race'. The rightful role of the 'Aryan peoples' was 'world conquest and the consolidation of colonial hegemony'.<sup>26</sup> Evola traced the rise of fascist racial consciousness to Mussolini's military campaigns in Africa, which brought Italians into contact with 'inferior peoples' and revealed the gulf separating Europeans from 'Negroes', 'Mongols', 'Redskins' and so forth.<sup>27</sup> But the 'Jewish problem' remained the central obsession. For Evola, Jews embodied all

19 Alberto Luchini, 'Posizioni e interpretazioni dell'intelligenza nazionalsocialista', *Critica Fascista*, 15 September 1932, 345–7; Luchini, 'Lettera dalla Germania: Religiosità della nuova gioventù', *Critica Fascista*, 15 December 1938, 58–60.

20 Hoffend, *Zwischen Kultur-Achse und Kulturkampf*, 398–9.

21 Alberto Luchini, 'Razza e Antirazza', *Gerarchia*, May 1940, 201–4; cf. Luchini, 'Nascita e durata della "razza fascista"', *Regime Fascista*, 15 July 1941, 3; Luchini (ed.), *Gli ebrei hanno voluto la guerra* (Rome 1942).

22 Roberto Maiocchi, *Scienza italiana e razzismo fascista* (Florence 1999), 278.

23 Massimo Scaligero, 'Coscienza del sangue', *Difesa della Razza*, 20 August 1942, 4–6.

24 Massimo Scaligero, *La Razza di Roma* (Tivoli 1939), 259. Cf. Scaligero, 'La decadenza spirituale del giudaismo', *Regime Fascista*, 18 September 1938, 5; Scaligero, 'Razzismo spirituale e razzismo biologico', *Vita Italiana*, July 1941, 36–41; Scaligero, 'Sangue e spirito', *Difesa della Razza*, 20 October 1941, 13–5; Scaligero, 'Per un Razzismo Integrale', *Vita Italiana*, May 1942, 428–34.

25 Evola to Scaligero, 19 September 1935, quoted in Gianfranco de Turreis, *Julius Evola: Un filosofo in guerra 1943–1945* (Milan 2016), 114.

26 Massimo Scaligero, 'Valori mediterranei della razza', *Vita Italiana*, March 1939, 307–13; Scaligero, 'Omogeneità e continuità della razza italiana', *Difesa della Razza*, June 5, 1939, 38–40. The latter article formed part of a special issue 'dedicated to the two races of the Axis', the Italians and Germans.

27 Julius Evola, *Sintesi di dottrina della razza* (Milan 1941), 12, 67, 131, 189. For background see E. M. Robertson, 'Race as a Factor in Mussolini's Policy in Africa and Europe', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23 (1988), 37–58; Stanley Payne, 'Fascism and Racism' in Terence Ball (ed.), *Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge 2003), 123–50.



of the destructive forces of modernity, from democracy to humanitarianism to racial mixing. Aryan victory required their elimination.

Claims like these offered potential points of contact with Nazi racial thinking, but simultaneously provoked intense opposition from rival fascist camps. Within the remarkably variegated spectrum of racial theories current in Italy at the time, Evola's version of spiritual racism constituted a minority strand.<sup>28</sup> Representatives of traditional Catholic anti-Judaism objected to its occult and pagan connotations, while scientific racists disapproved of its woolly philosophical categories and took umbrage at Evola's critique of biological approaches. When Mussolini's regime promulgated the racial laws, the scientific faction initially won the upper hand. The new policy was announced in July 1938 with the publication of the 'Manifesto of Racial Scientists', premised on a 'purely biological' understanding of race.<sup>29</sup> It declared Italians 'Aryans' and Jews a foreign racial group. The Manifesto was followed by a wave of antisemitic publications and increasingly severe legislation aimed against Italy's Jews.<sup>30</sup>

Though temporarily sidelined by the larger bloc of biological racists, Evola and his companions continued to promote their austere racism through a vigorous campaign in the fascist press. Evola did not conceal his contempt for Italian intellectuals who suddenly discovered they were antisemites in the summer of 1938. As he pointedly noted in early 1939, he had been trying 'to give an antisemitic orientation to fascist spirituality' since 1926.<sup>31</sup> In a high-profile article published in December 1938, Evola called for a 'totalitarian racism' that would do away with half-hearted gestures and 'confront the Jewish problem' in its entirety. It was essential to face the danger of Jewish contamination at both the biological and the spiritual level in order to mount 'a defense that is not only external but internal as well'. Only this 'comprehensive' racism could do justice to 'the tripartite nature

---

28 On the breadth of fascist racial thought see Mauro Raspanti, 'Le correnti del razzismo fascista', in Anna Capelli (ed.), *Antisemitismo in Europa negli anni Trenta* (Milan 2001), 238–51; Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy* (New York 2002); Francesco Germinario, *Fascismo e antisemitismo: Progetto razziale e ideologia totalitaria* (Rome 2009).

29 The Manifesto appeared under the headline 'Il Fascismo e il problema della razza' on the front page of *Giornale d'Italia*, 15 July 1938. The text is reprinted in Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* (Turin 1993), 555–6. For the larger historical context cf. 'Aryans and Others: The Fascist War against the Jews' in Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley, CA 2004), 148–57; Michele Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy: From Equality to Persecution* (Madison, WI 2006); Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, *L'Italia fascista e la persecuzione degli ebrei* (Bologna 2015); Simon Levis Sullam, *The Italian Executioners: The Genocide of the Jews of Italy* (Princeton, NJ 2018).

30 Gabriele Rigano, 'Storia, memoria e bibliografia delle leggi razziste in Italia', in Anna Foa and Marina Beer (eds), *Le leggi del 1938: Rimozione memoria storia* (Rome 2010), 187–209; Valeria Galimi, 'Politica della razza, antisemitismo, Shoah', *Studi storici*, 55 (2014), 169–81. For a contemporary assessment see Martin Agronsky, 'Racism in Italy', *Foreign Affairs*, January 1939, 391–401.

31 'Appunti sull'attività di J. Evola', Archivio Centrale dello Stato (hereafter ACS), MCP b. 121 f. 759.

of the human being – body, soul, and spirit'. The future of the 'Aryan race' depended on it.<sup>32</sup>

Over the next several months Evola spelled out this racial vision in a series of articles on 'the Aryan worldview' and 'the Aryan-Nordic tradition'. He explained that Aryan peoples like the Italians and Germans must be especially vigilant against 'the Semitic spirit' with its secularism, egalitarianism, and rationalism. By cultivating an 'integral racism', the Aryans could protect themselves against corruption by 'inferior races'.<sup>33</sup> Since pre-historic times, Evola warned, the great Aryan civilizations had been vulnerable to 'Oriental-Semitic decomposition' and the dilution of noble Aryan blood. Ancient Rome was built on Nordic-Aryan foundations, and its decline was due to racial debasement. Fascism, having revived the original Aryan spirit of the Roman Empire, must defend itself anew against the perennial Jewish threat.<sup>34</sup>

In a far-reaching review of the 'Jewish problem' published just before the start of the Second World War, Evola summarized his position. Like Nazism, fascism could not allow 'Jewish blood' to infect the Italian people. But the mixed ethnic character of the Italians demanded a more painstaking approach. Merely biological racism could never succeed in 'eliminating' the 'Semitic racial components' that had infiltrated the peninsula across the centuries. Italian culture itself had fallen prey to 'the Jewish virus', and physical markers of race did not register the danger from within. In the face of a 'Jewish conspiracy' against Aryan civilization, many so-called 'Aryans' had 'abandoned their posts', and some had even 'joined the enemy'. To overcome the baleful impact of the Jewish spirit, the racial campaign could not be left in the hands of those who 'woke up one morning as antisemites'. It needed guidance from committed advocates of the Aryan cause.<sup>35</sup>

Conjoining spiritual and biological factors into a 'totalitarian racism', Evola's principles reflected familiar features of the Aryan myth. The idea of an Aryan race, emerging in the nineteenth century, was based on a conflation of anthropology and philology that highlighted spiritual characteristics while claiming biological status. Aryans were said to be the originators of all the great civilizations of antiquity and

32 Julius Evola, 'Razzismo totalitario', *Rassegna Italiana*, December 1938, 847–53. The article concluded with a call for an 'Aryan front' against the 'common enemy' for the good of 'the entire civilization of white humankind'.

33 Julius Evola, 'Sulla visione ariana del mondo', *Rassegna Italiana*, March 1939, 167–75.

34 Julius Evola, 'Sulla tradizione nordico-aria (Razze, simboli, preistoria mediterranea)', *Bibliografia Fascista*, February 1939, 105–15. See also Evola, 'La razza come problema spirituale', *Regime Fascista*, 25 October 1938, 5; Evola, 'Supremi valori della razza ariana', *Difesa della razza*, 5 February 1940, 15–19; Evola, 'Che cosa significa "Ario"?', *Augustea*, 16 November 1941, 17–20.

35 Julius Evola, 'Inquadramento del problema ebraico', *Bibliografia Fascista*, August 1939, 717–28. For extended analyses of Evola's racial views compare Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 113–33; Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy*, 154–75; Giovanni Rota, 'Un filosofo razzista: Note su Evola', *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia*, 58 (2003), 459–96; Dana Lloyd Thomas, *Julius Evola e la tentazione razzista* (Brindisi 2006); Gianni Scipione Rossi, *Il razzista totalitario: Evola e la leggenda dell'antisemitismo spirituale* (Soveria Mannelli 2007); Olindo De Napoli, *La prova della razza* (Milan 2009), 213–18.



the carriers of humankind's noblest ideals.<sup>36</sup> In Evola's eyes, the essentially mythical nature of this construct was no hindrance. As he explained in a foundational text on race, a 'myth' was not 'simply fiction', but a powerfully creative concept built on 'non-rational elements'.<sup>37</sup> Evola did not shy away from the more arcane corollaries of the Aryan myth. He held that the 'Olympian' and 'solar' Aryan race came from 'Hyperborean' origins in the far north, bearing a divine lineage in a benighted world.<sup>38</sup>

Aside from the aura of historical grandeur it imparted, the Aryan myth was crucial to uniting Germans and Italians under a common racial banner. That project took on special urgency with the outbreak of war in September 1939. The conflict changed the basic conditions for any effort to bring fascism and Nazism closer together. In December 1939 Evola applied to join the Fascist Party, evidently seeing it as his duty to support the military efforts of the Axis even though Italy did not enter the war until June 1940. He sent letters through 1942 to contacts in the fascist apparatus boasting of his contributions to the cause. His application was rejected by the local party organization in Rome, which considered him an 'undesirable element'.<sup>39</sup> Evola appealed the decision, but it was upheld by the party's high court, an indication of the level of resistance he faced from his own compatriots.

He fared better with German audiences. Throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s Evola made frequent trips to Nazi Germany, giving speaking tours, meeting with SS officials, and attending conferences. In 1937 he took part in an international antisemitic convention in Erfurt and wrote a report for Italian readers.<sup>40</sup> A lecture tour in spring 1941 took Evola to Munich, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Cologne, and Berlin. These public talks, delivered in German, garnered extensive coverage in the Nazi press. His April 1942 lectures on race in Hamburg and Berlin, depicting a shared Aryan heritage that bound Italians and Germans together, received

36 Leon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth* (New York 1974); Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA 1992); Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science* (Chicago, IL 2006); Felix Wiedemann, 'The Aryans: Ideology and Historiographical Narrative Types in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', in Helen Roche (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Leiden 2018), 31–59. The myth was by no means universally accepted in Evola's day. As an early critic observed, 'the Aryan race, like the Aryan type and Aryan civilisation, is pure invention'. Jean Finot, *The Death-Agony of the "Science" of Race* (London 1911), 33.

37 Evola, *Il mito del sangue*, ix.

38 Evola, *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, 201–31; Evola, 'L'ipotesi iperborea: La culla della razza ariana', *Difesa della Razza*, 5 April 1939, 17–20. Cf. Mauro Raspanti, 'Il mito ariano nella cultura italiana fra otto e novecento' in Alberto Burgio (ed.), *Nel nome della razza: Il razzismo nella storia d'Italia 1870–1945* (Bologna 1999), 75–85; Timothy Bridgman, *Hyperboreans: Myth and History* (London 2011); David Allen Harvey, 'The Lost Caucasian Civilization: Jean Bailly and the Roots of the Aryan Myth', *Modern Intellectual History*, 11 (2014), 279–306.

39 The relevant materials are in ACS MCP b. 121 f. 759 Evola Julius; see in particular the 10 April 1943 letter from the Secretary of the Fascist party recounting the course of events.

40 Julius Evola, 'Il convegno di Erfurt e la questione ebraica', *Regime Fascista*, 15 September 1937, 3. For background on this 'pan-Aryan' congress see Michael Hagemeister, *Die "Protokolle der Weisen von Zion" vor Gericht* (Zürich 2017), 78.

particular praise.<sup>41</sup> In December 1940 Evola gave a presentation in German at a Nazi research institute in Rome, offering a spiritual glorification of war as a heroic Aryan value. It was published as a pamphlet in Vienna the following year.<sup>42</sup> At home, Evola remained a polarizing figure who aroused staunch opposition from fascist quarters. His long sojourns in Germany provoked contrary assessments: Some saw him as an unreliable fascist due to his strongly pro-German stance, while others cast him as excessively critical of Nazi policy and an irritant to the Axis partnership.<sup>43</sup> Undaunted, Evola continued to call loudly for Italy and Germany to 'move forward on the racist front'.<sup>44</sup>

For the Italian contingent of spiritual racists, a long awaited opening came in May 1941, when Evola's associate Luchini was appointed head of the 'Race Office' in the Ministry of Popular Culture. In a major victory over the biological racists, Luchini held the position for more than two years, until Mussolini was deposed in July 1943.<sup>45</sup> The group around Evola seized the chance to shape formal policy. Among their most important initiatives was the establishment of a series of anti-semitic institutes in cities across Italy. These 'Centers for the Study of the Jewish Problem' published a journal titled *Il Problema Ebraico* ('The Jewish Problem'). It was edited by Aniceto del Massa (1898–1975), another supporter of radicalized spiritual racism.<sup>46</sup>

Evola's own fortunes also took an upward turn. His voluminous antisemitic writings culminated in the 1941 magnum opus *Summary of Racial Doctrine*.<sup>47</sup> Mussolini read the book in Germany in late August 1941. Impressed by its arguments, he underlined passages emphasizing the link between spiritual dynamism and physical heredity.<sup>48</sup> Two weeks later, after returning to Italy, the Duce met

41 Carl Lange, 'Geistiger Brückenschlag zwischen Nord und Süd', *Neue Hamburger Zeitung*, 12 April 1942; Carl Augstein, 'Wiederentdeckung des olympischen Nordens', *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, 14 April 1942; copies can be found in ACS MCP b. 121 f. 759. Augstein's article reports that the Berlin audience responded enthusiastically to Evola's lecture. The same file contains additional clippings from the *Völkischer Beobachter*, *NS-Kurier*, *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, *Hamburger Tageblatt*, and others reporting on Evola's presentations.

42 Julius Evola, *Die arische Lehre von Kampf und Sieg* (Vienna 1941).

43 See the conflicting reports collected in the Political Police file on Evola: ACS Pol. Pol. b. 467 fasc. pers. Evola Julius. As is typical of such sources, many of the reports are unfounded; they characterize Evola as everything from a 'mystical anarchist' to an agent of international Jewry to an anti-fascist masquerading as a fascist extremist.

44 Julius Evola, 'Andare avanti sul fronte razzista', *Difesa della Razza*, 20 February 1941, 18–20.

45 See the file on Luchini's years as head of the Race Office, ACS SPD/CO b. 2411 f. 551694. The official name of the agency was 'Office for Study and Propaganda on Race.' According to Luchini, Mussolini directed that 'Evola's racist thought' guide the work of the Race Office: 13 April 1943 letter from Luchini, ACS MCP b. 121 f. 759.

46 For his collected articles from *Il problema ebraico* see Aniceto del Massa, *Razzismo Ebraismo* (Verona 1944).

47 Julius Evola, *Sintesi di dottrina della razza* (Milan 1941). The German translation appeared two years later: Evola, *Grundrisse der faschistischen Rassenlehre* (Berlin 1943).

48 De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*, 245–6, 255–6. De Felice's pioneering study, originally published in 1961, fundamentally misconstrued the nature of Evola's racism, and his interpretations have been superseded by subsequent research; see e.g. Francesco Cassata, "'Guerra all'ebreo': La strategia razzista di Giovanni Preziosi e Julius Evola (1937–1943)", in Michele Sarfatti (ed.), *La Repubblica sociale italiana a Desenzano: Giovanni Preziosi e l'Ispettorato generale per la razza* (Florence

with Evola and enthusiastically endorsed the querulous theorist's racial views. With official recognition at last, Evola was granted a monthly stipend of 2,000 Lira from the Ministry of Popular Culture.<sup>49</sup> For a time it seemed that the spiritual faction had attained predominant influence over fascist racial policy.

Emboldened by this new status, Evola embarked on an energetic attempt to bring together Nazi and fascist viewpoints on race and enable a frank discussion of differences. The goal, according to his follower Scaligero, was to erect a 'united Aryan front' between the two Axis powers.<sup>50</sup> At his September 1941 audience with Mussolini, Evola proposed a bilingual journal on racial questions, and the Duce agreed to support it. Reflecting Evola's amalgam of biological and spiritual themes, the journal was to be titled 'Blood and Spirit': *Sangue e Spirito* in Italian, *Blut und Geist* in German.<sup>51</sup> The fate of the project revealed both the ambitions and the limitations of spiritual racism as a 'solution' to the 'Jewish problem' while indicating the difficulties involved in efforts toward ideological collaboration between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Its transitory lifespan coincided with a new period of tensions in Mussolini's imbalanced relationship with Hitler, and unfolded just as the opening stages of the Holocaust were underway.<sup>52</sup>

Initial planning for the journal began at the Rome headquarters of the Race Office in November 1941. To expand its reach, Evola invited representatives from different currents of fascist racial thought to participate, including prominent biological racist Telesio Interlandi. Preziosi and Scaligero were involved from the beginning. As Evola explained to Mussolini, it was 'an essentially Italian initiative'.<sup>53</sup> German endorsement, however, proved elusive. In some respects Evola seemed an ideal interlocutor from a Nazi perspective: an outspoken antisemite who was thoroughly familiar with German culture and had Mussolini's ear.

But Nazi appraisals of Evola were divided. A January 1938 SS evaluation remarked on his 'astonishing knowledge of Aryan matters', while a June 1938 report from a different SS department concluded that Evola's confused teachings amounted to 'neither National Socialism nor Fascism'.<sup>54</sup> Assessments from Heinrich Himmler's *Ahnenerbe* organization, an SS institute devoted to the

2008), 45–75; Francesco Germinario, 'Razzismo e spinta totalitaria: Aspetti del dibattito fascista sull'antisemitismo', in Flores (ed.), *Storia della Shoah in Italia*, 257–80.

49 Julius Evola to Celso Luciano, 23 September 1941, ACS MCP b. 121 f. 759. Luciano was Chief of Staff in the Ministry of Popular Culture. In his autobiography Evola claimed that Mussolini expressed approval of his racial writings as early as 1934: Julius Evola, *Il cammino del cinabro* (Milan 1963), 80. For Mussolini's views on Evola cf. Yvon De Begnac, *Taccuini Mussoliniani* (Bologna 1990), 81, 391–2, 402–8, 646–7.

50 Massimo Scaligero, 'Fronte unico ario', *Difesa della Razza*, 20 February 1941, 21–24.

51 12 September 1941 memorandum for Luchini as head of the Race Office, ACS MCP b. 121 f. 759.

52 Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler*, 206–53; Federico Finchelstein, 'Fascism and the Holocaust', in Dan Stone (ed.), *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology* (Oxford 2012), 255–71.

53 Evola to Mussolini, 1 December 1941, ACS MCP b. 121 f. 759. For a detailed account of the early stages of the project see Luchini's 26 November 1941 'Appunto per il Capo di Gabinetto' in the same file. Important context is available in Bartikowski, *Der italienische Antisemitismus im Urteil des Nationalsozialismus*, 117–20.

54 'Notiz für Reichsführer SS', 2 January 1938, Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereafter BA), NS 19/1848, 2; 30 June 1938 report on 'Vortragsreihe Evola', Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer SS, BA NS 19/1848, 32–37.

'ancestral heritage' of the Aryans, similarly veered between praise and criticism. The organization's president, Orientalist Walther Wüst, held Evola in 'high esteem'.<sup>55</sup> An *Ahnenerbe* report from July 1938 offered a basically positive judgement of Evola's work but noted several points of disagreement, while observing that Evola seemed removed from current political realities in his own country.<sup>56</sup> These divergent perceptions came into sharper relief as plans for the 'Blood and Spirit' project moved forward.

Evola set the stage with a May 1941 speech in Berlin on Italian racism, declaring that 'the fascist turn toward the racial idea' was 'the logical development of our movement'. Italian racial policy represented fascism's commitment to the 'Nordic-Aryan' race alongside its German brother nation. Deriding the 'intellectuals and literary aesthetes' who had no understanding of the 'heroic, sacred, manly' Aryan heritage, Evola insisted that Nazism and fascism offered fully compatible and complementary racial programs, united in their common Aryan origins.<sup>57</sup> A few months later, Evola assured his Nazi contacts that he had met with Mussolini to discuss the bilingual journal on race and that the Duce fully supported the endeavor. He returned to Berlin in early 1942 to discuss the matter with German officials.<sup>58</sup>

Although initial Nazi evaluations of Evola's journal proposal were often positive, a predominant skepticism persisted. The concerns were ideological as well as strategic: on the one hand, Evola's theories accorded only a 'secondary role' to 'racial biology', and on the other hand, it remained unclear whether such a divisive figure was the 'most suitable partner' in coordinating Axis perspectives on this decisive topic.<sup>59</sup> Plans for the journal nonetheless reached an advanced stage. It was to be published monthly, with approximately 40 pages per issue. The Italian and German editions were to have their own editorial staffs, with Evola as editor in chief. Joint editorial meetings were to be held every three months.<sup>60</sup>

55 Horst Junginger, 'From Buddha to Adolf Hitler: Walther Wüst and the Aryan Tradition', in Junginger (ed.), *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism* (Leiden 2008), 107–77, quote on 129. On the *Ahnenerbe* see Michael Kater, *Das "Ahnenerbe" der SS 1935–1945: Ein Beitrag zur Kulturpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Stuttgart 1974). Evola's post-war admirers have confirmed his affinities with Wüst: Adriano Romualdi, *Julius Evola: l'uomo e l'opera* (Rome 1971), 43.

56 'Stellungnahme zu den Vorträgen des Baron Evola', 13 July 1938, BA NS 19/1848: 26. The unsigned document, addressed to Himmler, begins: 'Die Grundeinstellung von Evola ist von unserem Standpunkt aus im allgemeinen positiv zu werten.' It recommends that SS representatives remain in contact with Evola and exchange ideas with him, but that he not be enlisted as a propagandist. See also the 1938–39 *Ahnenerbe* file on Evola, BA NS 21/776, much of it concerning his racial views. Evola's followers have published a distorted selection of this material: Bruno Zoratto (ed.), *Julius Evola nei documenti segreti dell'Ahnenerbe* (Rome 1997).

57 Julius Evola, 'Die arisch-römische Entscheidung des faschistischen Italiens', typescript, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (hereafter PA), Inland I Partei, R 99164, 4–17.

58 'Betr.: Deutsch-italienische Zusammenarbeit auf rassepolitischem Gebiet', 8 January 1942, PA R 99164, 41.

59 'Deutsch-italienische Zusammenarbeit auf rassepolitischem Gebiet' (January 1942 document, signature illegible, prepared for internal use by the Rassenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP), PA R 99164, 45–8.

60 'Unterredung mit Baron J. Evola bezüglich der Gründung einer Rassenzeitschrift', 19 February 1942, PA R 99164, 62–9. Evola proposed the German title 'Blut und Geist: Deutsch-italienische Zeitschrift für Rassenprobleme und Weltanschauung', while the Italian edition was to be called

Evola hoped the inaugural issue would appear by summer 1942. He secured a promise of financial support from the Fascist Party, while German state and party agencies were to purchase 7,000 copies of each issue.<sup>61</sup>

Detailed preparations on the Italian side, however, met with delays and dissension on the German side. Evola put forward a list of 16 Italian collaborators approved by Mussolini, including Preziosi, Luchini, Scaligero, del Massa, and several other proponents of spiritual racism.<sup>62</sup> Nazi officials, in contrast, were unable to agree on an editor for the German half of the journal. Evola's favorite, Ludwig Ferdinand Clauß, had fallen afoul of rival Nazi racial theorists.<sup>63</sup> Evola instead proposed Johann von Leers, who was living in Rome at the time, as German editor. But the nomination of Leers was opposed by representatives of the so-called Amt Rosenberg, which claimed a voice in all ideological and cultural questions facing the Nazi party.<sup>64</sup> The dispute among Nazi officials over a German editor for the journal was never resolved, and the February 1942 Berlin meetings remained inconclusive.

Several different Nazi agencies were involved in negotiations over the 'Blood and Spirit' publication. The primary figure was Walter Groß, director of the Nazi party's Office of Racial Policy, who hosted the 1942 meetings. Groß was cautiously supportive of the project in spite of his doubts about Evola. Other German officials in attendance included Alfred Baeumler from the Amt Rosenberg; SS officer Franz Rademacher, head of the department of Jewish affairs in the Foreign Ministry; SS officer Albert Prinzing, an Italian specialist for the Foreign Ministry; and Werner Hüttig from Groß's Office of Racial Policy. Rademacher endorsed the project as an opportunity for 'comradely cooperation' with the Italian ally and a chance to spread German perspectives on race, while Baeumler remained skeptical 'from a biological point of view.'<sup>65</sup> The harshest assessment came from Hüttig, who submitted a detailed critique of Evola's racial theories in September 1942. Hüttig faulted Evola's treatment of scientific issues

'Sangue e spirito: Rivista per i problemi della razza e della visione del mondo in collaborazione italo-tedesca', *ibid.*, 67.

61 Evola to Walter Groß, 23 February 1942, handwritten letter in German, PA R 99164, 87–9.

62 'Richtlinien für die italienischen Mitarbeiter der zu gründenden Deutsch-Italienischen Zeitschrift "Blut und Geist"', PA R 99164, 70.

63 Compare Kater, *Das "Ahnenerbe" der SS*, 209–11; Hans-Jürgen Luthzöft, *Der Nordische Gedanke in Deutschland 1920–1940* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1971), 47–50; Christopher Hutton, *Race and the Third Reich: Linguistics, Racial Anthropology and Genetics in the Dialectic of Volk* (Cambridge 2005), 56–60, 183–6; Hans-Christian Harten, Uwe Neirich, and Matthias Schwerendt, *Rassenhygiene als Erziehungsideologie des Dritten Reichs* (Berlin 2006), 11–18, 137–47. For examples of his work see L. F. Clauß, *Die nordische Seele: Eine Einführung in die Rassenseelenkunde* (Munich 1934); Clauß, 'Woran erkennt man den Juden?', *Wir und die Welt* November 1940, 449–61; Clauß, *Rasse und Seele* (Munich 1943); Clauss, 'Coscienza di razza e idea imperiale', *Vita Italiana*, August 1940, 147–55; Clauss, 'Idee chiare sulla razza dell'anima', *Vita Italiana*, April 1941, 403–7.

64 Cf. Marco Sennholz, *Johann von Leers: Ein Propagandist des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin 2013), 247–9; Bartikowski, *Der italienische Antisemitismus im Urteil des Nationalsozialismus*, 146–9.

65 'Unterredung mit Baron J. Evola bezüglich der Gründung einer Rassenzeitschrift', PA R 99164: 62–9.

and his obscure mixture of incongruous sources, from ancient Aryan tradition to modern esoteric lore.<sup>66</sup>

Such disagreements reflected a larger split in Nazi viewpoints, one which went beyond Evola as an individual and indicated the contested status of Italian racism in German eyes. Some Nazi agencies were positively disposed toward Evola and his allies as 'Italian pioneers of the racial idea and the anti-Jewish movement'.<sup>67</sup> German officials stationed in Italy praised Preziosi, Luchini, and other spiritual racists for their intransigent antisemitism.<sup>68</sup> The German ambassador to Italy described Preziosi in early 1943 as 'the driving force behind the fascist regime's measures against the Jews'.<sup>69</sup>

The attitude of Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg was much more hostile. Rosenberg 'harbored pronounced antipathies against the Italians'.<sup>70</sup> His racial theories had been subjected to severe criticism in the pages of Preziosi's journal in the mid-1930s, and despite efforts toward reconciliation by Evola and others, it proved difficult to overcome the accumulated mutual resentments. Historical prejudices played a part. As an early study of the Rome-Berlin Axis notes, it was an 'intellectual fashion' among many Germans 'to attribute the collapse of the Roman Empire to an excess of racial interbreeding, and to despise the Italians as its hybrid descendents'.<sup>71</sup> This animosity had practical consequences; when a German translation of Preziosi's 1940 book *How Jewry planned the War* was proposed as part of the official Nazi party publication series, it was abandoned due to opposition from Rosenberg.<sup>72</sup>

It was not German antagonism, however, that brought the 'Blood and Spirit' project to a halt. According to the available documentation, Italian objections led to the cancellation of plans for the journal. Regardless of the preparations already made, by March 1942 Mussolini's support had begun to waver. Fascist officials inquired whether to 'support the initiative fully, delay it, or cancel it'.<sup>73</sup> Evola requested another audience with the Duce, but was asked to wait. In May 1942 the German ambassador relayed a report from Rome that Mussolini had revoked his support for the project.<sup>74</sup> The decision reportedly came at a tense meeting with the Duce that included Evola and two of his chief rivals: Interlandi, spokesman for

66 See Hüttig's 9 September 1942 report on an early manuscript of Evola's *Grundrisse der faschistischen Rassenlehre*, PA R 99164, 124-7. His criticisms did not prevent the book's publication the following year.

67 'Zur italienischen Judenfrage', 21 December 1941, PA R 99164, 54-5.

68 See e.g., Deutsches Generalkonsulat Triest an das Auswärtige Amt Berlin, 23 November 1942, PA Rom-Quirinal Geheimakten Bd. 124, E257690.

69 Deutsche Botschaft Rom an das Auswärtige Amt Berlin, 15 February 1943, PA Rom-Quirinal Geheimakten Bd. 125, E257917.

70 Bartikowski, *Der italienische Antisemitismus im Urteil des Nationalsozialismus*, 55.

71 Wiskemann, *The Rome-Berlin Axis*, 35; for Rosenberg, Wiskemann added, 'Italians were only fit to be low-grade slaves to the Germanic ruling caste.' Cf. Michaelis, *Mussolini and the Jews*, 36-42, 328-30.

72 Hoffend, *Zwischen Kultur-Achse und Kulturkampf*, 379-80. The book was Giovanni Preziosi, *Come il giudaismo ha preparato la guerra* (Rome 1940).

73 'Appunto per il Duce', 3 March 1942, ACS MCP b. 121 f. 759.

74 Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 'Betrifft: Zeitschriftenprojekt Evola', 15 May 1942, PA R 99164, 104.



the biological racists, and the Jesuit priest Pietro Tacchi Venturi, unofficial representative of Pope Pius XII.

In an unusual alliance, both Interlandi and Tacchi Venturi spoke against the journal project. The occult aspects of Evola's spiritual racism were a source of particular controversy. Anonymous denunciations sent to the fascist leadership had warned for years of 'an epidemic of esotericism' afflicting Italy.<sup>75</sup> Interlandi angrily protested 'occultist' perversions of the racist idea in a March 1942 letter to Mussolini.<sup>76</sup> Later that year Interlandi's journal published a harsh attack on Evola's 'nebulous spiritualism' by anthropologist Guido Landra.<sup>77</sup> For its scientific opponents, spiritual racism simply wasn't biological enough. Tacchi Venturi, for his part, insisted that Evola's project would lead to problems with the church, which viewed spiritual matters as its rightful territory and frowned on the pagan overtones of Evola's approach. The longstanding mutual hostility between Evola and the Catholic hierarchy helped doom the 'Blood and Spirit' program.<sup>78</sup>

Faced with the combined opposition of scientists and clergy at the May 1942 meeting, Mussolini decided that their concerns outweighed his own 'sympathy for Evola's work'.<sup>79</sup> Thus the aspirations for a dual Italian-German journal on racial questions remained unfulfilled. The fact that the project nonetheless progressed so far in the midst of war indicates the potential usefulness that various fascists and Nazis saw in it. Whatever doubts the ideology of spiritual racism may have aroused, a common racial agenda for the Axis powers retained substantial appeal. But it also revealed the limitations of any attempt to formulate a coherent foundation for the increasingly radical forms of antisemitism that prevailed in both Germany and Italy.

Evola's simultaneously spiritual and biological methodology, presented to his Nazi partners as a basis for negotiations over the 'Blood and Spirit' proposal, offered elaborate theoretical justification for a multi-pronged attack on the ostensible racial enemy. This line of attack would not only target physical characteristics but penetrate to the 'racial soul' as well. While race was based on 'heritable' factors and 'principally genetic', genuine racism could not be 'confined' to 'materialistic science'. For Evola, 'protecting biological purity' was just a first step; averting 'spiritual bastardization' was equally urgent. It was therefore crucial to extend racial vigilance to the spiritual dimension because 'despite their bodily

75 Unsigned denunciation dated Rome, 15 November 1938, ACS MI/DGPS G1 b. 28 f. 317.

76 Raspanti, 'Le correnti del razzismo fascista', 243.

77 Guido Landra, 'Razzismo biologico e scientismo', *Difesa della Razza* 5 November 1942, 9–11. Before the war Landra supported Evola's research in Germany; see Landra's official letter to Himmler from 8 March 1939 on the masthead of the Ministero della Cultura Popolare, BA NS 19/1848, 44.

78 On Evola's troubled relations with the church see Richard Drake, 'Julius Evola, Radical Fascism and the Lateran Accords', *Catholic Historical Review*, 74 (1988), 403–19. For the larger context cf. Renato Moro, *La Chiesa e lo sterminio degli ebrei* (Bologna 2002); Valerio De Cesaris, *Vaticano, fascismo e questione razziale* (Milan 2010); Lucia Ceci, *The Vatican and Mussolini's Italy* (Leiden 2017), 214–51.

79 Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 'Betrifft: Zeitschriftenprojekt Evola', 15 May 1942, PA R 99164, 104.

race', even those who appeared physically Aryan 'could be Jewish in soul and in life'.<sup>80</sup>

Though Evola's racism represented an extreme version of such views, the fear of a potential Jew lurking inside every gentile had a lengthy history within anti-Jewish thought.<sup>81</sup> Nor was the notion of a 'racial soul' a new invention. Evola shared this concept with his Nazi associate Clauß, but its derivation was considerably older. Tracing the religious roots of Western racial thought, George Mosse's classic study *Toward the Final Solution* noted that the emergence of modern racism was based in part on a growing emphasis on 'the "inner man" which would eventually lead to racial judgments about man's soul'.<sup>82</sup> This was the legacy upon which Evola's racial theory built. Putting it into practice was no easy task when powerful Nazis considered Italians themselves of dubious Aryan provenance.

Nevertheless, Nazi and fascist conceptions of the Jewish enemy were not as far apart as they sometimes seemed. Many of the disputes that occupied Evola were an expression of rivalry and cross-cultural misunderstanding rather than fundamental ideological incompatibility. Rosenberg himself held a spiritual view of race, pondering the mysteries of the 'racial soul' at length in his tome *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*. According to Rosenberg, race was 'a mystical synthesis' of soul and body.<sup>83</sup> Hitler's own diatribes against the 'Jewish spirit' echoed similar themes:

It is important to understand that to Hitler, 'Jewishness' was not confined to 'racial Jews'; non-Jews who sympathized with 'Jewish' inventions (democracy, socialism, internationalism, etc.) were also classified as Jews – not 'racial Jews,' but 'spiritual Jews.' This made Hitler's anti-Semitism far more flexible and destructive than the purely racial anti-Semitism of his radical predecessors and contemporary followers.<sup>84</sup>

Evola's core assumptions were shared across ideological boundaries: Jews routinely appeared as the personification of materialism, rationalism, and abstract thought, the antithesis of the creative Aryan life force, in fascist as well as Nazi contexts, in Christian as well as pagan forms of antisemitism, in spiritual as well as scientific currents of race thinking.

These findings offer an occasion to re-assess both Italian and German racial ideology. While the divisions over race theory among competing fascist factions reflected a number of specifically Italian factors, there were comparable

80 'Italienische Stellungnahme zur Rassenfrage für die Deutsch-Italienische Zeitschrift "Blut und Geist"', PA R99164, 71–80: 10-page typescript, undated but presumably January 1942. This was the text Evola submitted to the Nazi party Office of Racial Policy as the initial basis for discussion of the journal project.

81 See the discussion of the notion of 'Judaizing' across two millennia in David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York 2013), 59–60, 93–4, 117–20, 229–31, 309–10, 489–90.

82 George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York 1978), 3.

83 Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich 1930), 117; Rosenberg, *Race and Race History*, Robert Pois (ed.) (London 1970), 84.

84 Sarah Gordon, *Hitler, Germans, and the 'Jewish question'* (Princeton, NJ 1984), 92.

disagreements within Nazism. Far from a monolithic or unified force, Nazi racism comprised a tangle of contending strands scattered across an array of party and state offices. This internally contradictory historical record awaits adequate scholarly analysis.<sup>85</sup> In light of the unresolved issues, historians caution against the widespread tendency to ‘reduce the race concepts of National Socialism to a biological materialism’.<sup>86</sup> Nazi propaganda itself offered confirmation. ‘The racial principles of National Socialism’, the party’s race expert Walter Groß wrote in 1938, held that ‘races are not only physically but especially spiritually and intellectually different from each other’.<sup>87</sup> Even notorious SS perpetrators affirmed the composite nature of the ideology underlying the Holocaust. In a 1946 affidavit, SS functionary Dieter Wisliceny, responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of Jews, explained that Nazi antisemitism stemmed from two sources, a ‘pseudo-scientific biological’ component and a ‘mystical-religious’ component.<sup>88</sup>

Evola accentuated the mystical side of this ideological fusion while upholding its biological correlate; his works consistently focused on both ‘blood’ and ‘spirit’.<sup>89</sup> He demanded an antisemitism ‘without compromise’ and a ‘deeper alliance’ with Nazi Germany.<sup>90</sup> His ideas provided an unconventional chance for Italian-German accord on racial questions. But the rivalries and intrigues that characterized both regimes made it difficult to turn such commonalities into sustained practical assistance. The ambivalence that marked relations between fascism and Nazism ended up frustrating hopes for a closer partnership. Evola’s proposed synthesis of racial worldviews was unable to overcome the challenges of wartime cooperation and failed to transform the vexed alliance between the two dictatorships.<sup>91</sup>

85 Paul Weindling, ‘Genetics, Eugenics, and the Holocaust’ in Denis Alexander and Ronald Numbers (eds), *Biology and Ideology from Descartes to Dawkins* (Chicago, IL 2010), 192–214; ‘Nazi racial science remains scarcely examined in its theoretical or institutional contexts.’ (205)

86 Horst Junginger, ‘Introduction’, in Horst Junginger (ed.) *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism*, 18.

87 Walter Gross, ‘National Socialist Racial Thought’, in Joachim von Ribbentrop (ed.), *Germany Speaks* (London 1938), 66–78, quote on 74.

88 Quoted in Dan Michman, *The Emergence of Jewish Ghettos during the Holocaust* (Cambridge 2011), 147. Historians of the Holocaust have begun to explore the importance of ‘race mysticism’ in the Nazi worldview; see Dan Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust* (Oxford 2010), 192–9; Dan Stone, ‘Nazi Race Ideologues’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 50 (2016), 445–57; Devin Pendas, Mark Roseman, and Richard Wetzell (eds), *Beyond the Racial State: Rethinking Nazi Germany* (Cambridge 2017).

89 Compare Evola, ‘I tre gradi del problema della razza’, *Difesa della razza*, 5 January 1939, 11–3; Evola, ‘Sul concetto di Mistica Fascista e sui rapporti con la dottrina della razza’, *Dottrina Fascista*, March 1940, 555–6; Evola, ‘Sulla genesi dell’ebraismo come forza distruttrice’, *Vita Italiana*, July 1941, 25–35; Evola, ‘Razzismo nordico-ario’, *Difesa della Razza*, 20 April 1942, 10–1; Evola, ‘Razza ed ascesi’, *Rassegna Italiana*, April 1942, 164–9; Evola, ‘L’ora della selezione’, *Regime Fascista*, 21 February 1943.

90 Julius Evola, ‘La situazione del razzismo in Italia’, *Vita Italiana*, February 1941, 126–33; Evola, ‘Per una profonda alleanza italo-germanica’, *Vita Italiana*, August 1941, 128–34.

91 The collapse of the ‘Blood and Spirit’ project did not spell the end of Evola’s collaboration with Nazi agencies. He continued to work with the SS and spent the final year of the war in Germany. For his own account see Julius Evola, *Diario 1943–1944* (Scandiano 1989), as well as the reconstruction by his follower de Turreis, *Julius Evola: Un filosofo in guerra 1943–1945*. After the war, Evola became a mentor to the European far right; see Richard Drake, *The Revolutionary Mystique and Terrorism in Contemporary Italy* (Bloomington, IN 1989), 114–34, 188–95; Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy: The Radical Right in Italy after the War* (Princeton, NJ 1996); Mauro Lenci, *A destra,*

With his efforts on behalf of the abortive ‘Blood and Spirit’ undertaking, Evola cast the racial politics of Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany in an unexpected light: the Italian side overeager, the German side indecisive. A quixotic attempt to put the Aryan myth into practice, the episode formed part of a larger initiative, spanning a decade, to assert fascist priorities on race. Exacerbated by ideological differences and internal rifts, the questions it raised remain unresolved. Yet this ambiguous history can serve to dispel a number of myths that have arisen regarding racial ideology and the Rome–Berlin Axis. In the context of recent research, it counters the ‘fallacious judgement’ that fascist racial policies were ‘less deserving of opprobrium’ than their Nazi counterparts.<sup>92</sup> It helps explain why significant numbers of Italians, contrary to popular perception, actively participated in genocidal campaigns against Jews.<sup>93</sup> Last, it highlights the importance of ideological disputes and contributes to the ongoing revision of previous appraisals of spiritual racism as a supposedly more benign variant of antisemitic thought, preferable in some way to purely biological versions of racism.

Closer attention to cases like this can illuminate the enigmatic historical dynamics surrounding the political impact of seemingly abstruse beliefs about race. With the help of patrons in both Italy and Germany, Evola fought for ‘totalitarian racism’ in the name of a closer union between fascism and Nazism. Though his teachings along these lines were peculiar, the limits they faced were not; his endeavors followed the same troubled trajectory as other instances of Axis affiliation.<sup>94</sup> Still, Evola’s doctrines resonated in Italy and Germany alike. His syncretic re-working of the Aryan myth lent a grandiose sense of urgency to familiar antisemitic clichés while pressing for an intensification of concrete racial policies. He borrowed freely from disparate traditions, from religious anti-Judaism to scientific racism, from anthropology and archeology to modern antisemitic conspiracy theories, from any source that could help construct a compelling image of the fearsome Jewish peril.

oltre la destra: *La cultura politica del neofascismo italiano, 1945–1995* (Pisa 2012). Giuseppe Parlato, ‘Neofascismo italiano e questione razziale’, in Giorgio Resta (ed.) *Le leggi razziali* (Rome 2015), 147–79.


92 Tim Jacoby, ‘Theorizing Fascism: Cases, Comparison and Consensus’, *European History Quarterly*, 46 (2016), 702–6, quote on 705.

93 See Juliane Wetzel, ‘Der Mythos des “braven Italieners”’: Das faschistische Italien und der Antisemitismus’, in Hermann Graml (ed.), *Vorurteil und Rassenhass: Antisemitismus in den faschistischen Bewegungen Europas* (Berlin 2001), 49–74; Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi, ‘Kain in Rom: Judenverfolgung und Kollaboration unter deutscher Besatzung 1943/44’, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 54 (2006), 231–68; Davide Rodogno, *Fascism’s European Empire: Italian Occupation During the Second World War* (Cambridge 2006), 362–407; Filippo Focardi, *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano: La rimozione delle colpe della seconda guerra mondiale* (Bari 2013), 113–21; Alexis Herr, *The Holocaust and Compensated Compliance in Italy* (New York 2016).

94 Compare Alexander De Grand, *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: The ‘Fascist’ Style of Rule* (New York 2004); Alessandro Somma, *I giuristi e l’Asse culturale Roma-Berlino* (Frankfurt 2005); Benjamin Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture* (Cambridge, MA 2016); Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe (eds), *Fascism Without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945* (Oxford 2017); David Roberts, *Fascist Interactions: Proposals for a New Approach to Fascism and Its Era, 1919–1945* (Oxford 2017).

In a time when Evola's ideas are undergoing a revival, topics like these take on more than academic significance.<sup>95</sup> The entwinement of biological and spiritual beliefs about race is not a thing of the past, no minor concern in light of the porous boundary between putatively extremist ideologies and the cultural mainstream.<sup>96</sup> Evola's project may have failed in its era, but the resentments that animated it have by no means disappeared. Critical scholarship on allegedly ancient racial myths and their modern implementation can help clarify our understanding of a history that has lost little of its relevance. Opaque as they may seem to contemporary observers, the theories that Evola espoused in fateful interchange between Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy deserve renewed attention today.

### ORCID iD

Peter Staudenmaier  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3874-0579>

### Biographical Note

**Peter Staudenmaier** is Associate Professor of History at Marquette University. His research centers on Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the history of racial thought. He is currently working on a project tentatively titled 'Accomplices to Genocide: Antisemitic Intellectuals and the Path to the Holocaust in Fascist Italy'.

95 On Evola's current influence cf. Andrea Mammone, *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy* (Cambridge 2015), 62–78, 84–90, 167–71; Charles Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism* (New Haven, CT 2016), 158–60, 173–9; Jason Horowitz, 'Steve Bannon Cited Italian Thinker Who Inspired Fascists' *New York Times* (12 February 2017); Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg, *Far-Right Politics in Europe* (Cambridge, MA 2017), 144–9; Thomas Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right* (Washington, DC 2018), 216–21.

96 For perceptive reflections on this dynamic see David Roberts, 'How not to Think about Fascism and Ideology, Intellectual Antecedents and Historical Meaning', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35 (2000), 185–211; Francesco Germinario, *Argomenti per lo sterminio: Stereotipi dell'immaginario antisemita* (Turin 2011), 282–306; Aristotle Kallis, 'When Fascism Became Mainstream: The Challenge of Extremism in Times of Crisis', *Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, 4 (2015), 1–24.